

Observing the Eight Precepts

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Observance of the UPOSATHA or AṬA- SIL on the POYA Day

[Anguttara Nikaya Vol. IV. p. 248 ff. & p. 259 ff. Uposatha Vagga]

Translated by Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari

XLI

O monks, the observance of the *uposatha*, adhering to the eightfold precepts, is highly rewarding, splendid and magnificent [mahapphalo hoti mahānisaṃso mahājutiko mahāvippahāro AN. IV. 248]. How does one live this eightfold *uposatha* to be so wonderfully effective?

Herein O monks, a noble disciple thinks thus: The arahants live all their life abandoning destruction of life, refraining from killing, laying aside all weapons of

destruction. They are endowed with a sense of shame for doing evil, very benevolent and full of love and compassion for all living beings.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall abandon destruction of life, refrain from killing, laying aside all weapons of destruction. I shall be endowed with a sense of shame for doing evil, shall be benevolent and full of love and compassion for all living beings. In this manner I shall follow the way of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with this first virtue.

The arahants live all their life abandoning theft, refraining from theft, taking only what is given to them, wishing for only what is given to them. They live totally pure honest lives.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall abandon theft, and refraining from theft, taking only what is given, wishing for only what is given. I shall live a totally pure and honest life. In this manner I shall follow the way of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with this second virtue.

The arahants live all their life abandoning unchaste life, leading a chaste life of celibacy, keeping away from rustic sex life.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*] I shall abandon unchaste life, lead a chaste life of celibacy [*brama-cārī*], keep away from rustic practice of sex [*methunā gāma-dhammā*]. In this manner I shall follow the way of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with this third virtue.

The arahants live all their life abandoning false speech, refraining from false speech, being truthful in speech, true to their promises, honest, reliable, and not deceiving the world.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall abandon false speech, refrain from false speech, being truthful in speech, true to my promises, honest, reliable, and not deceiving the world. In this manner I shall follow the way of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with this fourth virtue.

The arahants live all their life keeping away from situations of 'error of judgement' arising from use of intoxicants. They refrain from falling into such situations.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall keep away from situations of 'error of judgement' arising from use of intoxicants. I shall refrain from falling into such situations. In this manner I shall follow the way of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with this fifth virtue.

The arahants live all their life taking only one meal a day, abstaining from the night meal and refraining from eating out of hours.

On this day, during the day and during the night [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall take only one meal a day, abstaining from the night meal and refraining from eating out of hours. In this manner I shall follow the way of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with the sixth virtue.

The arahants live all their life keeping away from dance performances, song recitals, musical orchestrations and variety shows. They also abstain from the use of flower garlands, perfumes, make up material and other forms of grooming and adornments.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall also abstain from all these. In this manner I shall follow the ways of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be

endowed with the seventh virtue.

The arahants live all their life abandoning seats and beds which are grand and luxurious, refraining from the use of such items. They use modest items of furniture like simple beds and grass mats.

On this day, **during the day and during the night** [*imañ ca rattiṃ imañ ca divasaṃ*], I shall give up the use of seats and beds which are grand and luxurious, refraining from the use of such items. I shall use modest items of furniture like simple beds and grass mats. In this manner I shall follow the ways of the arahants. My observance of the *uposatha* shall be fulfilled. He would be endowed with the eighth virtue.

O monks, the observance of the *uposatha*, adhering to the eight-fold precepts, lived in this manner is highly rewarding, splendid and magnificent.



The Buddha laments over the non-observance of regular Aṭṭa-Sil on the Uposatha day by people whose life is invariably threatened with fear of grief and fear of death. He calls it a lamentable failure [A.V. 83].

[Translated by Bhikkhu Professor Dhammavihari]

The Buddha was once living in the land of the Sakyas at Kapilavastu in the monastery named Nigrodhārāma. At that time many Sakyan lay-devotees came to see the Buddha on that Uposatha or Fast day. They greeted him and sat down on a side in his presence. The Buddha questioned those lay-devotees who were seated in his presence.

O Sakyans, do you observe the eight-fold precepts on the Fast day of the Uposatha? O Sir, on some days we do and on some days we do not [i.e. without any regularity].

He remarked. "O Sakyas, it is very **unfortunate** [*Tesaṃ vo sakkā alābhā tesam dulladdham*] that you **whose lives are invariably threatened with fear of grief and fear of death** [*soka-sabhaye jīvite maraṇa-sabhaye jīvite*] do observe the eight fold precepts of the Fast or Uposatha **only on some days and do not do so on some other days.**



Observance of AṬA-SIL or UPOSATHA in Sri Lanka today

Needs Drastic Reforms

Professor Dhammavihari Thera

The observance of the eight precepts, associated with the day of the *Uposatha*, referred to hereafter as AṬA-SIL [*Aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgato uposatho* - AN. IV. 248, 259] is as old as Buddhism itself. It must be pointed out at the very outset, and that with adequate emphasis, that **the seasonal observance** of AṬA-SIL [i.e. on days of the four moons of the month, of Full moon, New moon and the two Quarters of the waning and waxing moons] has to be the result of a wish for a minimal, but reasonably adequate, upgrading of the five moral precepts of *pañca-sīla* which every disciple or *śrāvaka* [i.e. *upāsaka* and *upāsikā*] of the Buddha is expected to follow without fail for the furtherance of his or her pursuit of the goal of Nibbāna.

There are numerous instances in Buddhist texts where the benefits of observing these basic precepts of *pañca-sīla* in the daily life of a householder are given in great detail. In the *Upāsaka Vagga* of the *Anguttara Nikaya* [AN. III. 211 ff.], the Buddha is seen in conversation with the venerable Sariputta, for the benefit of Anāthapiṇḍika as it were, and he seems to highlight the basic functional value of keeping the five precepts.

The perfect keeping of the five precepts [note here the words **perfect keeping** for which the Pali equivalent is *pañcasu sikkhā-padesu saṃvuta-kammanta*], coupled with the easy and successful acquisition of what are called the four states of **'blissful living in this very life'** [*diṭṭha-dhamma-sukhavihāra*] gives one the right to claim that one is a stream-winner or *sotāpanna*, i.e. one who is infallibly on the path to Nibbāna [*niyato sambodhi-parāyano*. loc. cit.], like a river which invariably ends up in reaching the ocean.

In this context, the five precepts which refer to 1. respect for life, 2. respect for others' ownership to their legitimately acquired possessions, 3. respect for propriety of sex relationships, 4. respect for honesty in word and deed and 5. respect for sanity of judgement maintained by keeping away from the use of alcohol and drugs, are too well known for further elaboration here.

The four states of **'blissful living in this very life'** [*diṭṭha-dhamma-sukhavihāra*] which together form the other component include the three-tiered **profound joy of total acceptance of** and **trust** [*avecca-pasādena samannāgato*] in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha. To this is added the **high-grade sublimated moral virtues** or *ariya-kanta-sīla* as the fourth item.

In this arrogant age of scientific and technological sophistication where the experts, and even the less-expert-ones, wish to be insensitive to the corrosive devastation which these very achievements bring about with them, there are many among both preachers and practitioners of Buddhism who decry this aspect of religious devotion and dedication [i.e. *saddhā* and *pasāda*] for self-correction. This aspect of religion is something which must and can be acquired only through serious religious application, by being contained within the religious framework and not by choosing to remain outside of it. The good moral life of *sīla* must be lived and not merely talked about.

Such people who opt to stand outside, for whatever self-approved reasons of their own, speak of verification of the Buddha word and make nonsense of the

much abused Kālāma Sutta, trying to force out of it many things that are not found within it. Speaking of verification, let it be known that the sutta implies no testing of the **truth** or **falsehood** of the Buddha word. The request by the Buddha is for one **to become experientially aware, by oneself**, and not by mere acceptance and belief, of the ill effects of greed, hatred and delusion [i.e. of *lobha dosa moha*] in one's own life. Please read the sutta once again, by your self, for your self. Do not go by what the experts say, we pray.

Further to such faith in the *tisaraṇa*, [and we hope you fully well comprehend what this implies !], the fourth consists of the joy of **being in the very high grades of moral virtue** or *sīla*- accomplishment [*ariya-kantehi sīlehi samannāgato hoti akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi ... samādhī-samvattanikehi*]. It is worth noting here that the Commentarial tradition rates this *ariya-kanta-sīla* as being part of the attainment of the path and its fruit [*ariyakantāni sīlāni 'ti magga-phala-samyuttakāni sīlāni*]. From there on, they will not deteriorate, even in the passage from one life to another. *Tāni hi ariyānaṃ kantāni honti. Bhavantare'pi apariccajjīyāni. AA. III. 245*]. These assets which have been listed here are already regarded as factors or characteristic features of *Sotāpatti* or those leading to that state [*sotāpatti-aṅga*].

The addition of three more precepts to this set of five [*pañca-sīla*], with an upgraded version of precept No. 3 [i.e. *kāmesu micchācārā veramaṇī*], changing chastity in sexual behaviour to one of total celibacy [*abrahmacariyā veramaṇī*], and making it the *aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgata* or the eight-fold code for observance as *uposatha* on the special days of the moon gives the *pañca-sīla* a tremendous elevation on the spiritual ascent. Let us now examine this spiritual enrichment and enhancement a little more in detail. The **five precepts clearly aim at restraining people** [*veramaṇī sikkhā-padam*] from **misanthropic misdeeds** through word and deed like destruction of life, misappropriation of property, and sexual improprieties. Even apart from the efficiency or otherwise of the law enforcement authority of a country, these five are **offences which any decent or cultured**

society would frown upon.

When we come to the seasonal observance of the four additional precepts under *uposatha-sīla*, we discover that they aim at a further degree of discipline-structuring for the lay community, desirable not only from a purely institutional religious angle, but also from a personal religio-ethical angle. They include *a.* total rejection of sexual gratification, *b.* rejection of regular normal meals after mid-day, i.e. the night meal and any other irregular eating [*rattūparato virato vikāla-bhojanā*], *c.* rejection of customary musical and theatrical entertainment and personal bodily grooming [*nacca- gīta- vādita- visūkadassana- mālā-gandha- vilepana- dhāraṇa- maṇḍana- vibhūsana'ṭṭhānā*], as well as *d.* rejection of extra-comfortable luxury-type beds and seats which are normally used by laymen in the household. They all imply a choice in the direction of austerity and curtailment, i.e. **a reduction in the pursuit of pleasure** or *nekkhamma*.

This is well and truly the *sīla-bhāvanā* one needs to initially embark upon if one has any serious thoughts about Nibbana as one's final goal of salvation. In their order of 3, 6, 7, and 8, the efficiency and perfection of the practice of these *sikkhāpadas* are all to be checked and tested through the **duration of the collective day and night division**, *divasaṃ* and *rattiṃ* of the *uposatha*. This is why the Buddhist monks of countries like Thailand and Burma, with an appreciable sense of honesty and understanding, make known to their lay community the significance of this day and night observance of the *uposatha* before they administer the *aṭṭhaṅga-sīla* on *uposatha* days.

These observations we have made herein expose the serious blunder of the **half-day observance** of *aṭṭha-sīla* carried on at present in Sri Lanka, under the cover of the ingenious but diabolic mechanism of what is referred to as *pavāraṇā*. We discover day after day, to our grievous lament, that hundreds of lay persons of Sri Lanka are totally unaware of this serious blunder through which they are being led, more or less blind-folded. They confess this to us, quite often with

tears in their eyes. It is regrettable, but it is not a day too early to throw the challenge and make bold to ask the question `Who in this country keeps the truth away and from whom?'

We have already noted above that the 3rd precept of chastity or propriety of sexual behaviour is now upgraded to total celibacy or *abrahmacariyā veramaṇī*. [Note that today this 3rd precept which unmistakably refers to **sexual impropriety** is being lamentably misinterpreted as **sensual impropriety**.] What is to be specially noted is that these **4 additional sikkāpadas** involve **a self-imposed discipline** extending **through both day and night** [*imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattim* AN.IV. 248 ff. & 259 ff.], of twenty-four hours duration. They anticipate and more or less approximate with the newly emerging disciplinary patterns like **'delay gratification'** coming to us now from the believed-to-be more sophisticated western world.

Note: "Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with. It is the only decent way to live. "

The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, p. 19.

Dr. Peck tells us further:

`This tool or process of scheduling is learned by most children quite early in life, sometimes as early as age five... While many have a well-developed capacity to delay gratification, some fifteen- or sixteen-year-olds seem to have hardly developed this capacity at all ; indeed, some seem even to lack the capacity entirely. They are the problem students...

They are impulsive, and their impulsiveness spills over into their social life as well. They get into frequent fights, they become involved with drugs, they begin to get in trouble with the police. Play now, pay later, is their motto. So the psychologists and psychotherapists are called in. But most of the time it seems

too late.' [loc. cit.].

The disciplinary process through carefully planned self-abnegation which is implied here, [it must not be missed], is also the vital ingredient of the disciplinary process of the *uposatha*. Very few people in Sri Lanka know that the Sinhala word *pehe vas* or its Pali equivalent *uposatha* comes from the original Indian idea of *upa + / vas* which means to observe a fast, i.e. keep away from partaking of food. **Monier-Williams Sanskrit - English Dictionary** [p. 206] explains ***upa + vasati*** at SBr. as `to abide in a state of abstinence, abstain from food, fast.' It further explains ***upa-vāsa*** as `a fast, fasting (as a religious act comprising abstinence from all sensual gratification, from perfumes, flowers, unguents, ornaments, betel, music, dancing &c.), Gaut.'

This indeed is the vital and vibrant aspect of the ***uposatha*** in the Indian religious culture. The Buddhists gratefully took over this for their basic religious apprenticeship..

In the Buddhist *uposatha* of the eight-fold code [*aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgata-uposatha*], all the above concepts of the Brahmanic tradition [which includes even the abstinence from the use of betel] seem to be included. These are contained in the precepts 6, 7, and 8 which are reckoned also as part of discipline of the monk under *Cūla-sīla* at [DN. I. 5 & 64] which are added on to the *pañca-sīla* of regular day to day observance. In addition to this, one has to take serious note of the revised version of precept No. 3 of the *Pañcasīla* as *abrahmacariyā veramaṇī* in the re-structuring of the *Aṭṭhaṅga-sīla*.

Precept No. 6 of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha* **lays special emphasis on the concept of the fast**. It is very specific about this. **It clearly forbids the night meal** [*rattiṃ na bhuñje* at Sn. v. 400. At DN. I. 64. it is included under the *Cūla-sīla* of the monk as *rattūparato*. See also DN. I. 5 for its inclusion as a virtue of the Buddha.]. In addition, it also lays a ban on eating out of hours, both for the *uposathika* and the monk [*uposathika // na vikāla-bhojanaṃ* at Sn. v. 400, and for

the monk // *virato vikāla-bhojanā* at DN.I. 64. Also at DN.I. 5 as above].

Note the totality of this discipline about food for the monk elaborated under *Cūla-sīla* at DN.I. 5 & 64 as *Eka-bhattiko hoti rattūparato virato vikāla-bhojanā*. As a discipline for the *uposathika*, it is adequately clear and specific at Sn. v. 400: *rattim na bhuñjeyya vikālabhojanaṃ*. His fast in the night and his abstinence from eating out of hours during the day, throughout his observance of the *uposatha*, are unmistakably indicated in the Commentary [SnA. 1.377] on the above quoted verse: *Rattim na bhuñjeyya vikālabhojanan 'ti rattim' pi na bhuñjeyya divā 'pi kālātikanta-bhojanaṃ na bhuñjeyya*. [Backed by this Commentarial explanation, we prefer to read the above verse as *rattim na bhuñje na vikāla-bhojanaṃ*, clearly identifying *rattibhojana* and *vikāla-bhojana* as **two different** items.] This comment clearly presents two ideas, namely 1. the fast at night and 2. abstaining from eating out of hours during the day. In spite of this unmistakable clarity both in the text and the Commentary regarding the discipline in the food habits of both the *uposathika* and the monk, we notice a very grave error in the translation of the said verse in the Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Series. It takes *vikāla-bhojana* as 'taking a night-meal which is reckoned a meal out of hours': *vikāla-bhojana-saṅkhyāta rātri-bhojana no valandaneya* [BJTS Vol. XXV Sutta Nipata, p. 121].

We are also very distressed that the PTS Pali-English Dictionary, in its explanation of the term *uposatha*, makes no mention at all about this aspect of its observance, namely the fast. [It deals more with the monastic ritual observances of the *uposatha*]. The very basic idea of the *fast* of the laymen does not come in at all, except in a single reference to the word *uposathika*. A vast range of invaluable information is thereby lamentably lost to the student of Pali, and hence also to the student of Buddhism. We are equally unhappy with the entry which reads as follows: 'On Up. days laymen take upon themselves the Up. vows, that is to say, the eight Silas, during the day.' This phrasing **On Up. days laymen... during the day** seems to imply to us that the laymen take upon themselves the

precepts only for the day and not for the night.

Whichever way this rendering is taken, let us emphatically add that the Buddhists must take their eight precepts of the *uposatha*, **for observance during both day and night of the *uposatha* day** [*imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattim* . AN. IV. 248 ff. & 259 ff. See also Sn. v. 403 *Tato ca pāto upavutthūposatho*]. It must also be very strictly remembered that the Buddhist Pali **concept of *uposatha* requires total abstinence from the night meal** [*rattūparato*]. It is equally distressing to find the Sri Sumangala Sinhala Sabda-kosaya of Venerable Sorata Thera guilty of this same omission of leaving out the reference to abstinence from the night meal in its definition of *pehe-vas* [taking only *vikāla-bhojanā* and completely turning a blind eye to *rattūparato*].

In the light of these observations which we make, based entirely on the evidence of Pali Buddhist texts, we are compelled to make certain critical remarks about what goes on in Sri Lanka as *sīla-vyāpāra* or keeping of the *uposatha*. **The changing nature of things in the world or *anicca* as a crucial characteristic of all phenomenal existence does not necessarily justify changes in religious thinking or restructuring religious institutions which are derived from them.**

Within the last forty or fifty years, Sri Lankans appear to have changed or transformed their observance of the *uposatha* and reduced it to a half-day [10 / 24 hours and 5 / 8 precepts] program. It is tragic that it does not seem to survive even from dawn to dusk. It lasts even much less. We have even heard of mothers who manipulate to terminate early the eight precepts which their children have taken in the morning to enable them to take their biscuits and milk tea in the afternoon. Shockingly misguided motherly love and miserable failures in parental leadership in the home.

That people have many things to do in the course of a day [one single out of 28, 29, 30 or 31 days of a month], or that they must necessarily return home by

night [for the safeguarding of whatever it may be], does not justify this curtailment. We hold the view **that this high-handed pruning is thoroughly disgraceful** and **completely negates the very spirit of the *uposatha***. They may very well change the venue of the *uposatha* in the course of a single day [if return home they must], but they must continue the observance of the totality of the precepts they have taken upon themselves. As to how far back this devastating change goes in history, we have not yet been able to adequately research. Nor have we been able to accurately record as to what percentage of *uposatha* observers do it this way. We wish to investigate and examine.

More than forty years ago in the heat of the Buddha Jayanti excitement there was a keen interest, and perhaps justifiably so, to attract more and more people to places of worship. To do this successfully, there was perhaps also the need to make many concessional offers. **Shorter and less demanding programs of religious activity** could have been **an attractive bait**. The result of this would have been a flattering turnout at the more popular temples, particularly at the metropolitan ones. The competitively attractive outcome of this would also have intoxicated some of the publicity-seeking institutions. But simplification in many areas of society today have resulted in malnutrition. Religion is no exception to this. But unmindful of this degeneracy, many institutions would make loud announcements about their increasing attendance on the *uposatha* days.

Leadership among monks and laymen in Sri Lanka often joined hands in assuring people that what would normally be a more rigorous program of strict observances could be redesigned to fit into a much shorter period of time. **And also with a lot more of listen-in items than do-it-yourself ones**. Many *popular preachers*, both monk and layman, would wax eloquent on such platforms on many currently popular subjects like *bhāvanā* and Abhidhamma. And this to audiences who are less inclined to believe in the reality of rebirth and would rather prefer to make supplication to *living gods* who are imported from anywhere for the fulfilment of their day to day wishes and needs, like gifts of gold and silver

and success at various undertakings like examinations and interviews. These programs were attractively studded with intermittent benedictory chants of *parittas* at which the lay community were, in many institutions, invited to join the monks to chant in sing song style.

The more serious part of the *uposatha*, the abstinences and the fasting were deliberately forgotten and completely cut out. The assurance of getting back home well before sunset was the key to the success of this newly introduced *sīla-vyāpāra*. Free meals at lunch time were generously provided. The *uposatha* day's few additions to the regular daily *pañcasīla* which were **coming in to be tested**, more or less, **at night time**, like the choice to eat or reject dinner, to sit down to have diverse forms of entertainment or to do silent meditation, came to be disowned and disinherited by evening through an ingenious [but stupid] new formulary called the *pavāranā* [We only know of the village *mantara-kāraya* or *kaṭṭadiya* using this word *pavāraṇā* in the sense of termination of his *mantra* chanting.].

An older or younger monk, apparently totally ignorant of what he is doing, would administer *pansil* to an audience to terminate their *uposatha*, who unwittingly though, had pledged that self same morning to observe the eight precepts, without any awareness whatsoever that it was for twenty-four hours, or without ever being told by any one that it was to be so [*imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattim*].

Well before the sun has set, the temple premises would be emptied and cleared of the crowd, with the very vital contents of the *uposatha sīla* [nos. 6, 7, and 8] being left behind in the temple yard, by many if not all, to be salvaged only from the garbage bins. What a sad scenario for a twenty-five centuries old Buddha, to behold such a decline and devastation of his dispensation? The devotees who had spent a carnival-like rush day with very little time to peacefully absorb anything from their spiritual grooming would be sent back home with a

flattering note that they would now be free to eat, sing and dance and be even free to use as they like their beds [*uccāsayana-mahāsayana*] as laymen would do on any day of the month [Indeed a very natural assumption]. Even if not intended, everyone knows this is the net result of an *uposatha* day's grand performance. No more no less.

What do we Buddhists think? Dismiss it all or think of any possible or necessary reform? Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions, both of the monks and the laymen, heavily structured as they are, are far too involved and for the same reason far too insensitive to apprehend any of the threatening dangers that lie ahead of us. Like the Pyramids of the Nile Valley, let them be as they are and where they are. Let them serve in any capacity they think they can. But we believe that among Buddhist individuals, the saner men and women of this country, there are many who are both capable and are anxious to rethink on their past and re-plan their future, both for their own sake and for the sake of their unborn children and grandchildren. They could well make their own temples within their family structures, incorporating all the younger and the older, the males and the females, not to speak of the in-laws of all ranks. They only need to gather themselves together and humbly invite the Buddha into their homes. We all need to kneel before him and apologise to him for our blasphemous behaviour in his name and in his presence. We do not need too many middle men. Let us thereafter live directly under the shadow of his teachings.

We also have a few preliminaries to attend to. We need first to rediscover a little bit of the old *dhamma*. The Abhidhamma, we could be sure, would find its way into its rightful place in due course. The real Sutta teachings about *dukkha* and *nirodha* as taught by the Buddha have to be surfaced foremost. Some things about the Four Noble Truths and about actualising them in our own lives come next: *ti-parivaṭṭaṃ dvādsākāraṃ* as taught in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. This, we believe, has to be learnt anew. Hardly have we heard it being ever preached. We need a better grasp of the teachings on the Noble Eightfold

Path, more in their sequential gradual order to live and to develop, each stage in succession.

We need to acquire our *sammā-dīṭṭhi* as the first and initial item on the path and not be blindly led to believe that it is equal to *paññā* of the three-fold training of *sīla - samādhī - paññā*. Let it be reminded again and again that if one looks after the graduated eight-fold way and reach the eighth stage of *sammā-samādhī* [yet within the *magga* itself], then *paññā* as the ninth stage [beyond the *magga*], will invariably greet one there and gladly usher him into the tenth stage of *vimutti* or release in Nibbana: ... *sammā-samādhissa sammā-ñāṇam pahoti sammāñāṇassa sammā vimutti pahoti. Iti kho bhikkhave aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgato sekho paṭipado dasaṅga-samannāgato arahā hoti.* [MN.III. 76 Mahācattālīsaka Sutta]. While on the Eightfold Path, one is still only a learner [*sekho*] and it is only after the acquisition of *paññā* that one qualifies for the status of arahant.

In the light of what we have said so far, let us endeavour to restore gradually, and very gradually indeed, the *uposatha* in its full stature back into the lives of our laymen and laywomen, even away from the temples, if we are driven to do so. With *tisaraṇa* well set in their hearts [... *buddhe dhamme saṅghe aveccappasādena samannāgato*], the really earnest Buddhists could well afford to do with much less of the side-attractions of *bodhi-pūjā* and *deva-pūjā* which the temples invariably offer in confusing profusion, thoughtlessly subscribing to so-called contemporary needs.

Domesticise your Buddhism a little more [i.e. live with it as you live your household life] and make its achievements a source of personal joy in life. This is what we referred earlier as **this-life blissful living** or *dīṭṭha-dhamma-sukha-vihāra* [AN.III. 211]. One must gain mastery over them and learn to acquire them with ease [... *abhicetasikānaṃ dīṭṭhadhamma-sukha-vihārānaṃ nikāmalābhiṃ akicchālābhiṃ akasiralābhiṃ* loc.cit.]. This should verily be so to you and to everyone in your family. The need of the day is a vibrant Buddhist sensitivity to

the real truths of the *dhamma* and a meaningfully constructive Buddhist co-operation.

Ciraṃ tiṭṭhatu saddhammo loko hotu sukhī sadā.

May the Good Dhamma prevail long in the world and may all life in the world live in comfort.



Observing the Eight Precepts on the Uposatha Day

Heresy And / Or Hearsay In Sri Lanka

It has to be learnt and remembered both by monks and laymen of Sri Lanka that details of procedure for the observance of the eight precepts or aṭṭhaṅga sīla [Sinhala aṭa-sil] on the uposatha days [which are really four in number in the Buddhist calendar] have been indelibly written down in Buddhist texts. Its observance has also been traditionally maintained, and is done so even up to this day, with an impressive degree of genuine sincerity in all Buddhist lands like Siam [Thailand], Burma [Myanmar], Cambodia and others. This observance is to be carried through the duration of a complete day i. e. including the two halves of the day as this day and this night, referred to in Pali as *imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattim* [See Anguttara Nikaya Vol. IV. pp. 248 ff. ; 259 ff. and Vol. V. p. 83]. Neither through the Dhamma nor the Abhidhamma can one ever smuggle into this the promiscuity of personal choice to make the observance of aṭa-sil a convenient one of day-time duration, lasting hardly beyond sunset, at the latest. This is what is being extensively done in Sri Lanka today, and that for the most part, with the complete blessings of the monastic community.

It needs neither the traditional titles of seniority within the Sāsana nor university degrees obtained from the vast array of institutions now flourishing throughout the country, to comprehend the worth of this overnight observance of

the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* as handed down in the Buddhist tradition from the time of the Buddha. The cause of this failure, i.e. not knowing one's own scriptural tradition, whether of the monk or the layman, could be no more and no less than the unwillingness to acquaint oneself with these and the catastrophic failure, particularly by the promoters of the religion, to learn the language in which these original traditions are preserved.

All the additional precepts of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla*, over and above the items of *pañca-sīla* which are assumed to be of regular day to day observance by the Buddhist lay community, imply a high degree of restraint and self discipline. They promote a very noteworthy progress and advance in the culture and the personality development, in terms of Buddhist religious values, of the human individual, man or woman. Nay, even of those whom we refer to as children. This is only if they do understand their implications [or are made to do so], by those who give the lay persons these additional items of restraint and discipline on the days of the *uposatha*. The precepts beyond the five of the *pañca-sīla*, i.e. numbers 6, 7 and 8 of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla*, imply the following.

Item No. 6 [*vikāla-bhojanā veramaṇī*] counts on the **strength of character of an individual**, the man or the woman who undertakes to keep the *uposatha*, pledging with the words *samādiyāmi*, to forego with a solemn strictness, his or her night meal [specifically referred to as *rattūparato*], with the further addition of *virato vikāla-bhojanā* which also includes abstinence from eating out of hours, i.e. between main meals. What do the honorable men and women in Sri Lanka who take this precept in the morning do, on their return home well before even sunset, having abandoned their precepts **through a fraudulently tutored diabolic ritual** called *pavāraṇā*, indulged in both by the givers and the takers? Do not fraudulently fool your selves. Remember that *vikāla-bhojanā veramaṇī*, believed to be both given and taken by people in the morning with perfect sanity, not only forbids the intake of food at night on the *uposatha* day, but also bans eating at irregular hours [i. *rattūparato* and ii. *virato vikāla-bhojanā*].

Such restrictions are known to be willingly accepted by responsible persons in many walks of life, like astronauts who venture out into outer space, or rowing crews in Cambridge and Oxford boat races who are reliably commissioned to do a special job of work. We have personally known in the fifties of the last century, the behavior of Cambridge University boat crews who, during the rowing season kept away from alcohol, smoking and late hours, under instructions from authorities. No wonder such persons come out with flying colours.

Buddhism maintains that this very basic discipline and restraint over the intake of food contributes very much to the restraint with regard to all other forms of sensory greed [*kabaliṅkāra-āhāre pariññāte pañca-kāmaguṇika-rāgo pariññāto hoti*. SN. II. 99]. This latter, namely **the resultant restraint with regard to all forms of sensory greed** is high-lighted by the Buddha himself in this context. In this conquest resulting from **the triumph over the greed for food**, the Buddha himself is seen saying, that there exist no more bonds [*saññojana*] which can bring an *ariyan* disciple back to *samsāric* sojourning [*Pañca-kāmaguṇika-rāge pariññāte natthi taṃ saññojanaṃ yena saññojanena saññyutto ariya-sāvako puna imaṃ lokaṃ āgaccheyya*. loc.cit.]. What else can be a true basis for this vitally important discipline or restraint for the initiation of Nibbāna-oriented religious culture than this willingness to cut off the greed for food, at least from time to time, on specific occasions.

Precept No. 6 of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* which reads as *vikālabhojanā veramaṇī* aims at fostering the cultivation of this restraint of fasting, of foregoing the night meal and eating out of hours. This is, as it were, the stepping stone to the observance of the *uposatha* on the full moon day. The vast majority in Sri Lanka who habitually terminate their *uposatha* with the despicable practice of what is called the *pavāranā*, well before sunset [**often with the approval, veiled or otherwise of the sīla-givers**], have to be declared as blatantly challenging the very basic concept of restraint which is so vital to the Buddhist concept of liberation from Samsāra to Nirvana.

It may be added here in passing that the Buddha in the Bhaddāli Sutta [MN. I. 437 ff.] tells a congregation of monks, of the down-to-earth physical benefits in the life of a Buddhist disciple, of cutting down the consumption of food to one meal a day. He tells this, borne out of his own life style. He claims exemption from disease and physical discomfort as a result of this, as well as more lightness of body and greater strength. While everyone in the congregation accepted the Master on his word, there was at least one among them by the name of Bhaddāli, who according to the sutta, expressed his unwillingness to accept this suggestion.

The other two new items in the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla*, i.e. Nos. 7 and 8 curtail [for the **duration of just twenty-fours only**], sensory gratification via music and dancing and theatrical entertainment [*nacca-gīta-vādita-visūkadassana*] as well as bodily beautification [*mālā-gandha-vilepana-dhāraṇa-maṇḍaṇa-vibhūsanatṭhānā*], together with rejection of physical bodily comfort enjoyed through luxury beds and couches [*uccāsayana-mahāsayanā*].

It is also to be remembered that under the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla*, the item No. 3 of the *pañcasīla* which reads as *kāmesu-micchācārā veramaṇī* and means **chastity** or **propriety and decency in sex gratification** is reworded under the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* to read as *abrahmacariyā veramaṇī* and means **complete celibacy** or total abstinence from sexual relationships, during the twenty-four period of the *uposatha*.

It should now be clear to the keener student, both Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, that the theme of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* in Buddhism is designed **to groom the sincere Buddhist lay disciple** who is keen **on his ultimate liberation in Nirvana** through this **gradual process of discipline and restraint**. It has to be appreciated by everyone that this is built upon a voluntarily cultivated process of renunciation, of *nekkhamma saṅkappa* which is no more and no less than the very second stage in the Noble Eightfold Path.

In the more cultured world of modern philosophy and psychology, the courageous new idea of **delay gratification** is becoming a very vibrant concept which aims at **human development** and **culture**. The Buddha who attained his enlightenment on this very earth, on a Vesak full moon day in the distant past, and thereby became our teacher and guide, delivered this message to mankind more than two and a half millennia ago.

The *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* which is recommended to the lay men and women is meant to serve this purpose. At best, it is to be observed in all seriousness four times a month, on the basis of the lunar calendar, on the days of the full moon and the new moon, and the two quarters of the waning and waxing moons. Undertake to do only what you can possibly do. Let not the Buddhist religious leadership in the country mislead and fool the others by saying that the observance of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha sīla* is a **matter of personal choice**, whether you make a full day or half a day of it. Or speak recklessly saying that its observance even for half a day is better than nothing. This is no more and no less than the perpetuation of a damnable fraud, with mutual connivance on the part of both the givers and the takers.

Let not *sīla-vyāpāra* in this country be mere glamorous fashion parades any more, for display from dawn to dusk of lay men and women who patronize their prestigious institutions of choice. We consider the expeditious correction of the errors we point out here to be priorities of paramount importance in the midst of contemplated religious reforms in the country. This is of far greater importance, much more than the correction of parliamentary behavior. It is not a day too early **for the lay community to step in and take the lead.**



Replacement of the Aṭṭhanga Uposatha-sīla with the Ājivaṭṭhamaka-sīla in the Western World a Colossal Blunder

Lower and Higher Sīlas [Pan-sil and Aṭa-sil] of the Lay Community and their observance within the household

The two main divisions of *sīla* which are observable by the lay community known to the early Buddhist Canonical texts is no more than *pan-sil* [*pañca-sīla*] and *aṭa-sil* [*aṭṭhanga-uposatha-sīla*]. The next specific *sīla* identification in these texts comes as *dasa-sikkhāpadāni* which are laid down for observance by novitiates, i.e. new entrants to the *sāsana* through *pabbajjā* or ordination as *sāmaṇera* and *sāmaṇerī*. Those who pledge to be followers of the Buddha and pursue the way of life made known by him formally take refuge in them, saying *saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* [= We take refuge in...] The sole guide in their Buddhist life thereafter had to be jointly these two primary items of the Buddha and the Dhamma, the master and his teaching. In fact, those who took refuge in two items in that manner came to be called *dve-vācika-upāsaka*. In course of time, a third item, namely the body of exemplary disciples of the Buddha who, spiritually qualified themselves to attain the same goal of enlightenment as the Buddha himself came to be added to this group of refuges, thus constituting the triad known as *tisaraṇa* or three-fold refuge.

This whole-hearted acceptance with conviction of *tisaraṇa* establishes the new convert firmly in the new faith. Thereafter he has to undertake his journey in the direction of his goal of Nirvana or terminating of his rolling on in *saṃsāric* continuance [*sandhāvati saṃsaratī*]. The process of culture needed for this is known as *sikkhā* which means training or disciplining in and goes through three successive stages referred to as *tisso sikkhā*.



Ājivatthamaka Sīla - 1st Reference in DA.I. 314 ff. Mahāli Sutta [DN. I. 150-8]

*Iti imesu aṭṭhasu dhammesu Bhagavatā nibbānādhigamāya paṭipannassa yogino bahūpakārattā **paṭhamam sammādiṭṭhi desitā**. Ayaṃ hi paññāpajjoto paññāsatthan ' ti ca vuttā. Tasmā etāya pubbabhāge **vipassanā-ñāṇa-sarikhātāya sammādiṭṭhiyā** avijjandhkāraṃ vidhamitvā kilesa-core ghātento khemena yogāvacaro nibbānaṃ pāpunāti. Tena vuttaṃ ' Nibbānādhigamāya paṭipannassa yogino bahukārattā **paṭhamam sammādiṭṭhi desitā ' ti**.*

***Sammā samkappo pana tassā bahukāro. Tasmā tadanantaram vutto.** Yathā hi heraññako hatthena parivattetvā parivattetvā cakkhunā kahāpaṇaṃ olokento Ayaṃ kūṭo yam cheko ' ti jānāti evaṃ yogāvacaro ' pi pubbabāge vitakkena vitakketva vitakketvā vipassanā paññāya olokayamāno ' Ime dhammā kāmāvacarā ime dhammā rūpāvacarādayo ' ti jānāti. Yathā vā pana purisena koṭiyaṃ gahetvā parivattetvā parivattetvā dinnaṃ mahārukkaṃ tacchako vāsiyā tacchetvā kamme upaneti evaṃ vitakkena vitakketvā dinne dhamme yogāvacaro paññāya ' Ime kāmāvacarā ime rūpāvacarā ' ti ādinā nayena paricchinditvā kamme upaneti. Tena vuttaṃ **'sammā-samkappo pana tassā bahukāro tasmā tadanantaram vutto ' ti**.*

*Svāyaṃ yathā sammā-diṭṭhiyā evaṃ sammā-vācāya ' pi upakārako. Yathāha ' Pubbe kho gahapati vitakketvā vicāretvā pacchā vācaṃ bhindaṭi ti **tasmā tadanantaram sammā vācā vuttā**. Yasmā pana idaṅ ca idaṅ ca karissāmī ' ti paṭhamam vācāya samviditvā loke kammante payojenti **tasmā sammā-vācā kāya-kamma upakārakā ' ti sammā-vācāya anantaram sammā kammanto vutto**.*

Catubbhidaṃ pana vacī-duccaritaṃ tividhañ ca kāya-duccaritaṃ pahāya ubhaya-sucaritaṃ pūrentass ' eva yasmā ājīva-aṭṭhamakaṃ sīlaṃ pūreti na itarassa. Tasmā tad-ubhayantaraṃ sammā ājīvo vutto.

This discussion makes it quite clear that **ājīvaṭṭhamaka-sīla** here is **a single item of sīla** which specifically refers to **sammā ājīva** of the Eightfold Path. It does not seem to imply a bundle of *sīla* like *pañca-sīla* or *aṭṭhaṅga-uposatha-sīla*. It is given here as coming after the listing of **sammā diṭṭhi** and **sammā saṅkappa**: *tad-ubhayantaraṃ sammā ājīvo vutto*. Those two also seems to be viewed as *sīla*.

Evaṃ visuddhājīvena pana ' Parisuddho me ājīvo ' ti ettāvatā paritosam katvā sutta-pamattena viharituṃ na yuttaṃ.

Atha kho 'Sabba-iriyāpathesu idaṃ viriyaṃ ārabhitabban ' ti dassetuṃ tadanantaraṃ sammā-vāyāmo vutto. Tato āraddha-viriyenā ' pi kāyādisu catusu vatthusu sati supaṭṭhitā kātabbā ' ti dassanatthaṃ tadanantaraṃ sammā-sati desitā.

Yasmā pana evaṃ supaṭṭhitā sati samādhissa upakārāpakārānaṃ dhammānaṃ gatiyo samannesivā pahoti ekattārammaṇo cittaṃ samādhātuṃ tasmā sammā-satiyā anantaraṃ sammā-samādhi desito ' ti vedītabbo.



These BIG BLUNDERS about ATA-SIL or UPOSATHA in Sri Lanka

Professor Dhammavihari Thera

The observance of the eight precepts, associated with the day of the *Uposatha*, referred to hereafter as ATA-SIL [*Aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgato uposatho* -

AN.IV. 248, 259] is as old as Buddhism itself. It must be pointed out at the very outset, and that with adequate emphasis, that the seasonal observance of ATASIL [i.e. on days of the four moons of the month, of Full moon, New moon and the two Quarters of the waning and waxing moons] is the result of a wish for a minimal, but reasonably adequate, upgrading of the five moral precepts of *Pañca-sīla* which every disciple or *sāvaka* [i.e. *upāsaka* and *upāsikā*] of the Buddha is expected to follow without fail for the furtherance of his pursuit of the goal of Nibbana.

There are numerous instances in Buddhist texts where the benefits of observing these basic precepts of *pañca-sīla* in the daily life of a householder are given in great detail. In the Upasaka Vagga of the Anguttara Nikaya [AN.111.211 ff.], the Buddha is seen in conversation with the venerable Sariputta, for the benefit of Anathapindika as it were, and he seems to highlight the basic functional value of keeping the five precepts. The perfect keeping of the five precepts [note the words **perfect keeping** = *pañcasu sikkhā-padesu samvutakammantaṃ*], coupled with the easy and successful acquisition of what are called the four states of ' **this-life blissful living**' [*ditṭha-dhamma-sukhavihāra*] gives one the right to claim that one is a stream-winner or *sotāpanna*, i.e. one who is infallibly on the path to Nibbana [*niyato sambodhi-parāyano* loc.cit.].

The five precepts which refer to 1. respect for life, 2. respect for others' ownership to their legitimate possessions, 3. respect for propriety of sex relationships, 4. respect for honesty in word and deed and 5. respect for sanity of judgement maintained by keeping away from the use of alcohol and drugs, are too well known for elaboration here. The four states of **this-life blissful living** which forms the other component include the three-tiered **impeccable joy of total trust** [*avecca-pasīdena samannāgato*] in the Buddha, Dhamma and the Sangha together with [the fourth item of] the **high-grade sublimated moral virtue** [*ariyakanta-sīla*].

Further to such faith in the *tisarāṇa*, the fourth consists of the joy of being in the very high grades of moral virtue or *sīla* accomplishment [*ariya-kantehi sīlehi samannāgato hoti akhaṇḍehi acchiddehi asabalehi akammāsehi ... samādhi-samvattanikeh*]. It is worth noting here that the Commentarial tradition rates this *ariya-kanta-sīla* as being part of the attainment of the path and its fruit [*Ariyakantāni sīlānī ' ti magga-phala-saṃyuttakāni sīlāni* . From there on they will not deteriorate, even in the passage from one life to another. *Tāni hi ariyānaṃ kantāni honti. Bhavantare ' pi apariccajjiyāni*. AA.III.245]. These assets which have been listed here are already regarded as factors or characteristic features of *Sotāpatti* or those leading to that state [*sotāpatti-aṅga*].

The addition of three more precepts to this set of five [*pañca-sīla*] and making it the *aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgata* or the eightfold code for observance as *uposatha* on the special days of the moon gives the *pañca-sīla* a tremendous elevation on the spiritual uplift. Let us examine this spiritual enrichment and enhancement a little more in detail. The five precepts clearly aim at restraining people [*veramaṇī sikkhā-padam*] from misanthropic misdeeds through word and deed like destruction of life, misappropriation of property, and sexual improprieties. Even apart from the efficiency or otherwise of the law enforcement authority of a country, these five are offences which any decent or sensible society would frown upon.

When we come to the seasonal observance of the three additional precepts, we discover that they aim at a further degree of discipline-structuring, desirable not only from a purely institutional religious angle, but also from a personal religio-ethical angle. In their order of 6, 7, and 8, they are [for a duration of twenty-four hours] *a.* rejection of normal meals after mid-day [*rattūparato virato vikāla-bhojanā*], *b.* rejection of customary musical and theatrical entertainment and personal bodily grooming [*nacca-gīta-vādita* and *mālā-gandha-vilepana-dhāraṇa-maṇḍana*], as well as *c.* rejection of extra-comfortable luxury-type beds and seats which are normally used in the household. They all imply a choice in

the direction of austerity and curtailment. What is to be specially noted is that they involve a self-imposed discipline extending through both day and night [*imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattiṃ* AN.IV. 248 ff. & 259 ff.], of twenty-four hours duration. They anticipate and more or less approximate with the newly emerging disciplinary patterns like 'delayed gratification' coming to us now from the believed-to-be more sophisticated western world.

Note: Delaying gratification is a process of scheduling the pain and pleasure of life in such a way as to enhance the pleasure by meeting and experiencing the pain first and getting it over with. It is the only decent way to live.

The Road Less Traveled by M. Scott Peck, p. 19.

Dr. Peck tells us further:

This tool or process of scheduling is learned by most children quite early in life, sometimes as early as age five. While many have a well-developed capacity to delay gratification, some fifteen-or sixteen-year-olds seem to have hardly developed this capacity at all ; indeed, some seem even to lack the capacity entirely. They are the problem students. .. They are impulsive, and their impulsiveness spills over into their social life as well. They get into frequent fights, they become involved with drugs, they begin to get in trouble with the police. Play now, pay later, is their motto. So the psychologists and psychotherapists are called in. But most of the time it seems too late.

loc. cit.

The disciplinary process through carefully planned self-abnegation which is implied here, [it must not be missed], is also the vital ingredient of the disciplinary process of the *uposatha*. Very few people in Sri Lanka know that the Sinhala word *pehe vas* or its Pali equivalent *uposatha* comes from the original Indian idea of *upa + / vas* which means to observe a fast, i.e. keep away from partaking of food. **Monier-Williams Sanskrit - English Dictionary** [p. 206] explains *upa + vasati*

at SBr. as ' to abide in a state of abstinence, abstain from food, fast.' It further explains *upa-vīsa* as ' a fast, fasting [as a religious act comprising abstinence from all sensual gratification, from perfumes, flowers, unguents, ornaments, betel, music, dancing &c.], Gaut.' This indeed is the vital and vibrant aspect of the *uposatha* in the Indian religious culture. The Buddhists gratefully took over this for their basic religious apprenticeship..

In the Buddhist *uposatha* of the eightfold code [*aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgata uposatha*], all the above concepts of the Brahmanic tradition [which includes even the abstinence from the use of betel] seem to be included. These are contained in the precepts 6, 7, and 8 [reckoned also as part of discipline of the monk under *Cūla-sīla* at DN.1. 5 & 64] which are added on to the *pañca-sīla* of regular day to day observance. Precept No. 6 of the *aṭṭhaṅga uposatha* lays special emphasis on the concept of the fast. It is very specific about this. It clearly forbids the night meal [*rattim na bhuñje* at Sn. v. 400. At DN.1. 64 it is included under the *Cūla-sīla* of the monk as *rattūparato*. See also DN.1. 5 for its inclusion as a virtue of the Buddha.]. In addition, it also lays a ban on eating out of hours both for the *uposathika* and the monk [*uposathika // na vikāla-bhojanaṃ* at Sn. v. 400 & monk // *virato vikāla-bhojanā* at DN.1. 64. Also at DN.1. 5 as above].

Note the totality of this discipline about food for the monk elaborated under *Cūla-sīla* at DN.1. 5 & 64 as *Eka-bhattiko hoti rattūparato virato vikāla-bhojanā*. As a discipline for the *uposathika*, it is adequately clear and specific at Sn. v. 400. His fast in the night and his abstinence from eating out of hours during the day through his observance of the *uposatha* are unmistakably indicated in the Commentary [SnA. 1.377] on the above quoted verse [*Rattim na bhuñjeyya vikālabhojanan ' ti* [We prefer to read *rattim na bhuñje na vikāla-bhojanaṃ*] *rattim' pi na bhuñjeyya divā ' pi kālātikanta-bhojanaṃ na bhuñjeyya*]. This comment clearly presents two ideas, namely 1. the fast at night and 2. abstaining from eating out of hours during the day. In spite of this unmistakable clarity both in the text and the Commentary regarding the discipline in the food habits of both the

uposathika and the monk, we notice a very grave error in the translation of the said verse in the Buddha Jayanti Tripitaka Series. It takes *vikāla-bhojana* as 'taking a night-meal which is reckoned a meal out of hours': *vikāla-bhojana-saṅkhyāta rātri-bhojana no valandaneya* [BJTS Vol. XXV Sutta Nipata, p. 121].

We are also very distressed that the PTS Pali-English Dictionary, in its explanation of the term *uposatha*, makes no mention at all about this aspect of its observance, namely the fast. [It deals more with the monastic ritual observances of the *uposatha*]. The very basic idea of the fast of the laymen does not come in at all, except in a single reference to the word *uposathika*. A vast range of invaluable information is thereby lamentably lost to the student of Pali, and hence also to the student of Buddhism. We are equally unhappy with the entry which reads as follows: 'On Up. days laymen take upon themselves the Up. vows, that is to say, the eight Silas, during the day.' This phrasing **On Up. days laymen ... during the day.** seems to imply to us that the laymen take upon themselves the precepts only for the day and not for the night.

Whichever way this rendering is taken, let us emphatically add that the Buddhists must take their eight precepts of the *uposatha*, for observance during both day and night of the *uposatha* day [*imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattim* . AN. IV. 248 ff. & 259 ff. See also Sn. v. 403 *Tato ca pāto upavutthuposatho*]. It must also be very strictly remembered that the Buddhist Pali concept of *uposatha* requires total abstinence from the night meal [*rattūparato*]. It is equally distressing to find the Sri Sumangala Sinhala Sabdakosaya of Venerable Sorata Thera guilty of this same omission of leaving out the reference to abstinence from the night meal in its definition of *pehe - vas* [taking only *vikāla-bhojanā* and completely turning a blind eye to *rattūparato*].

In the light of these observations which we make, based entirely on the evidence of Pali Buddhist texts, we are compelled to make certain critical remarks about what goes on in Sri Lanka as *sīla-vyāpāra* or keeping of the

uposatha. The changing nature of things in the world or *anicca* as a crucial characteristic of all phenomenal existence does not necessarily justify changes in religious thinking or restructuring religious institutions which are derived from them. Within the last forty or fifty years, Sri Lankans appear to have changed or transformed their observance of the *uposatha* and reduced it to a half-day [10 / 24 hours and 5 / 8 precepts] program. It is tragic that it does not seem to survive even from dawn to dusk. It lasts even much less. We have even heard of mothers who manipulate to terminate early the eight precepts their children have taken in the morning to enable them to take their biscuits and milk tea in the afternoon. Shockingly misguided motherly love and miserable failures in parental leadership in the home.

That people have many things to do in the course of a day [i.e. out of 28, 29, 30 or 31 days of a month], or that they must necessarily return home from the temple by night [for the safeguarding of their possessions whatever they may be], does not justify this curtailment of the duration of the *uposatha*. We hold the view that this high-handed pruning is thoroughly disgraceful and that it completely negates the very spirit of the *uposatha*. They may very well change the venue of the *uposatha* in the course of a single day [if return home they must], but they must continue the observance of the totality of the precepts they have taken upon themselves. As to how far back this devastating change in Sri Lanka goes back in history, we have not yet been able to adequately research. Nor have we been able to accurately record as to what percentage of *uposatha* observers do it this way. We wish to investigate and examine.

More than forty years ago in the heat of the Buddha Jayanti excitement there was a keen interest, and perhaps justifiably so, to attract more and more people to places of worship. To do this successfully, there was perhaps also the need to make many concessional offers. Shorter and less demanding programs of religious activity could have been an attractive bait. The result of this would have been a flattering turnout at the more popular temples, particularly the

metropolitan ones. The competitively attractive outcome of this would also have intoxicated some of the publicity-seeking institutions. But simplification in many areas of society today have resulted in malnutrition. Religion is no exception to this. But unmindful of this degeneracy, many institutions would make loud announcements about their increasing attendance on the *uposatha* days.

Leadership among monks and laymen in Sri Lanka often joined hands in assuring people that what would normally be a more rigorous program of strict observances could be redesigned to fit into a much shorter period of time. And also with a lot more of listen-in items than do-it-yourself ones. Many popular preachers, both monk and layman, would wax eloquent on such platforms on many currently popular subjects like *bhāvanā* and Abhidhamma. And this to audiences who are less inclined to believe in the reality of rebirth and would rather prefer to make supplication to living gods who are imported from anywhere for the fulfillment of their day to day wishes and needs, like gifts of gold and silver. These programs were attractively studded with intermittent benedictory chants of *parittas* in which the lay community were, in many institutions, invited to join the monks to chant in sing song style.

The more serious part of the *uposatha*, the abstinences and the fasting were deliberately forgotten and completely cut out.. The assurance of getting back home well before sunset was the key to the success of this newly introduced *sīlavāpāra*. Free meals at lunch time were generously provided. The *uposatha* day's few additions to the regular daily *pañcasīla* which were **coming in to be tested more or less at night time**, like the choice to eat or reject dinner, to sit down to have diverse forms of entertainment or to do silent meditation, came to be disowned and disinherited by evening through an ingenious [but stupid] new formulary process called *pavāraṇā* [*pavāraṇā* = termination?]. An older or younger monk, apparently totally ignorant of what he is doing, would administer *pansil* to an audience to terminate their *uposatha*, who unwittingly though, had pledged that self same morning to observe the eight precepts for twenty-four

hours [*imañ ca divasaṃ imañ ca rattim*: already referred to above].

Well before the sun has set, the temple premises would be emptied and cleared of the crowd, with the very vital contents of the *uposatha sīla* [nos. 6, 7, and 8] being left behind in the temple yard, by many if not all, to be salvaged only from the garbage bins. What a sad scenario for a twenty-five centuries old Buddha, to behold such a decline and devastation of his dispensation? The devotees who had spent a carnival - like rush day with very little time to peacefully absorb anything from their spiritual grooming would be sent back home with a flattering note that they would now be free to eat, sing and dance and be even free to use as they like their beds [*uccāsayana-mahāsayana*] as laymen would do on any day of the month [Indeed a very natural assumption]. Even if not intended, everyone knows this is the net result of an *uposatha* day's grand performance. No more no less.

What do we Buddhists think? Dismiss it all or think of any possible or necessary reform? Sri Lankan Buddhist institutions, both of the monks and the laymen, heavily structured as they are, are far too involved and for the same reason far too insensitive to apprehend any of the threatening dangers that lie ahead of us. Like the Pyramids of the Nile Valley, let them be as they are and where they are. Let them serve in any capacity they think they can. But we believe that among Buddhist individuals, the saner men and women of this country, there are many who are both capable and are anxious to rethink on their past and replan their future, both for their own sake and for the sake of their unborn children and grandchildren. They could well make their own temples within their family structures, incorporating all the younger and the older, the males and the females, not to speak of the in-laws of all ranks. They only need to gather themselves together and humbly invite the Buddha into their homes. We all need to kneel before him and apologize to him for our blasphemous behaviour in his name and in his presence. We do not need too many middle men. Let us thereafter live directly under the shadow of his teachings.

We also have a few preliminaries to attend to. We need first to rediscover a little bit of the old *dhamma*. The Abhidhamma, we could be sure, would find its way in due course. The real Sutta teachings about *dukkha* and *nirodha* as taught by the Buddha have to be surfaced foremost. Somethings about the Four Noble Truths and about actualizing them in our own lives come next: *ti-parivaṭṭaṃ dvādsākāraṃ* as taught in the Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta. This, we believe, has to be learnt anew. Hardly have we heard it being ever preached. We need a better grasp of the teachings on the Noble Eightfold Path, more in their sequential gradual order to live and to develop, each stage in succession.

We need to acquire our *sammā-ditṭhi* as the first and initial item on the path and not be blindly led to believe that it is equal to *paññā* of the three-fold training of *sīla - samādhi - paññā*. Let it be reminded again and again that if one looks after the graduated eightfold way and reach the eighth stage of *sammā-samādhi* [yet in the *magga* itself], then *paññā* as the ninth stage [beyond the *magga*], will invariably greet one there and gladly usher him into the tenth stage of *vimutti* or release in Nibbana [... *sammā-samādhissa sammā-ñāṇam pahoti sammāñāṇassa sammā vimutti pahoti. Iti kho bhikkhave aṭṭhaṅga-samannāgato sekho paṭipado dasaṅga-samannāgato arahā hoti.* M.III. 76 Mahacattālīsaka Sutta]. While on the Eightfold Path one is still only a learner [*sekho*] and it is only after the acquisition of *paññā* that one qualifies for the status of arahant.

In the light of what we have said so far, let us endeavour to restore gradually, and very gradually indeed, the *uposatha* in its full stature back into the lives of our laymen and laywomen, even away from the temples if we are driven to do so. With *tisaraṇa* well seated in their hearts [... *buddhe... dhamme...saṅghe aveccappasādena samannāgato*], the really earnest Buddhists could well afford to do with much less of the the side-attractions of *bodhi-pūjā* and *deva-pujā* which the temples invariably offer in confusing profusion, shamelessly subscribing to so-called contemporary needs.

Domesticize your Buddhism a little more [i.e. live with it as you live] and make its achievements a source of personal joy in life. This is what we referred earlier as **this-life blissful living** or *diṭṭha-dhamma-sukha-vihara* [AN.III. 211]. One must gain mastery over them and learn to acquire them with ease
 [...*abhicetasikānaṃ diṭṭhadhamma- sukha-vihāraṇaṃ nikāmalābhiṃ akicchālābhiṃ akasiralābhiṃ* loc.cit]. This should verily be so to you and to everyone in your family. The need of the day is a vibrant Buddhist sensitivity to the real truths of the *dhamma* and a meaningfully constructive Buddhist cooperation.

